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REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

By Governor Howard Pyle

It has been some little time now since we've had an opportunity to visit with you concerning events and problems in our state government.

You've had reports, of course, since many of these radio stations broadcast the three messages that have been presented to the second regular session of the 21st Legislature.

Now that the Legislature has completed two-thirds of this session and is entering the final phase of its deliberations, it seems only fair that you should have an up-to-the-minute report on just where we stand.

This is an advantageous point at which to take stock of things, because most of the committees of the house and the senate have completed the greater part of the more detailed study of bills, and many measures are now ready for consideration by the full Legislature.

The committees have had a real burden this time. At the close of business today, almost 400 bills have been introduced in the two houses. To be exact, representatives have sponsored 286, while senators have introduced 105.

These, of course, are just the proposed laws. There also have been introduced 37 resolutions calling for referral of various proposals to next November's ballot. Then there have been 16 memorials and other types of resolutions, all of which must have the same kind of consideration that is given to proposed direct enactments of laws.

Just what will come out of all these measures in the way of direct benefits for all of the people of Arizona would be almost impossible to approximate at this point. Not even the Legislature would know at this time. It can't know until there has been a meeting of minds of majorities of the 19 senators and 80 house members.

So far this session has sent 5 proposed laws to the Governor's desk for approval.

These have been routine bills - - - bills that were unopposed or had little opposition and were easy to pass quickly. What they accomplish is something else again.

The very first bill received was a simple little act making a technical change in a law of the 21st Legislature's first session - - but that change makes it possible for us to proceed at once with additional and very important construction work at the Children's Colony near Randolph.

The early bills are usually of this nature, or they are for small appropriations to make up a deficiency in this or that fund or department. Similar bills follow along throughout the session. It's certainly obvious that the Legislature couldn't possible prepare 450 or more bills in one session and have all of them of vital consequence to the state. The trivial have to go right along with the vital.

We all know, too, that there are bills already in the hopper that almost nobody but the sponsor wants to see passed. The good judgment of the Legislature usually sees to it that these bills consume little time and go nowhere. Actually such measures are only a fraction of the total.

What all of us -- and not just the Legislature -- are concerned about are the bills which have been drafted to meet some of the major needs of the state as a whole. Almost every one of our present requirements is covered in legislation now in progress. It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of many of the issues at stake. Failure to act in many instances would involve penalties the state and its people cannot afford.

For instance, the Legislature clearly recognizes that financing Arizona's grade and high school education is the Number One problem. This is shown by the number of different bills that have been introduced offering different approaches to the same goal.

We have only just introduced a series of 8 closely co-ordinated bills that the department of education, the attorney general, the governor and the sponsoring legislators believe will combine to reduce the size of our financial problem by approximately one half.

Frankly these bills have been delayed somewhat, but for unavoidable reasons. The facts on which they're based weren't fully known until the Legislature was convening, and mathematical computations to prove their necessity weren't completed until well after the session was under way. This accounted for the special message to the Legislature on the topic of education, on February 1st.

We are confident that the adoption of these eight bills will take out of the distressed class about half of the school districts now having difficulty with their financing and their local tax rates. We feel sure, too, that the studies have shown that for the present we do not have to find millions upon millions of dollars of additional revenue to pour into our schools. Present aggregate expenditures appear fully adequate for our school needs IF a portion of the money can be redistributed so as to cut down the painfully high property tax rates in a good many of our school districts.

As we explained to the Legislature, adoption of the corrective legislation that has been proposed, followed by an intensive analysis of the current year's school costs, should demonstrate this to everybody's satisfaction before another school year gets under way.

Quite properly the Legislature has held up action on all school legislation until all of the proposals could be studied together, so that the best course of action could be selected.

The Number One subject for action in this Legislature to date has been taxation, and it is here that the summer-long committee work and the October special session have begun to pay off. The house already has passed on to the senate the rewritten income tax law, plus the act to put luxury tax licenses on an annual basis.

These are two of the four measures that we have long known were essential if we are to be able to stop leaks that are now costing us millions of dollars in justly due revenue every year. The other two, of course, are the measures tightening sales tax collections, and the use tax -- neither of which has been considered as yet by this session.

A special reference is due on the income tax act. Much has been made of the fact that it is a voluminous measure, well over 200 pages of text, and that I made certain critical comments about it in my opening message to the Legislature.

My fear was that, while we were plugging up loopholes in our present law, we were risking losses in over-all revenue by reason of the particular arrangement of rates and other changes that were a part of the new bill. We are now certain that corrections made in the house have met this objection, and that as the bill now stands before the senate, it will do the job we have wanted done. Perhaps there isn't too general an understanding and appreciation of what this job is.

It's more than a matter of plugging loopholes. We have been determined to prevent the creation of new loopholes, and this is why the bill is so long.

Our present income tax act is fairly simple, but the business of applying it to many types of businesses, has been a very complex job. To make its operations uniform, it has been necessary for the state tax commission to make many administrative rulings involving both definitions and procedures.

This has meant that the tax commission has been faced with the possibility that its rulings might be challenged in court and thrown out on the general ground that the commission was taking over legislative functions. Therefore the Legislature decided to spell it all out in the law itself, so there wouldn't any longer be an element of doubt.

As to other legislation, the house has already sent to the senate a considerable number of worthwhile bills.

Among these, and worthy of particular mention, are the bills to create a state department of personnel.

This is the worthiest kind of legislation in our continuous effort to improve the efficiency of government itself . . . to do a better job at less cost. The direct objective of these bills, as is now generally well understood, is to remove the rank and file of our state employees from the stresses and strains of political changes, and make merit instead of favoritism the basis for job seeking and holding.

In another field, the 21st Legislature has a new opportunity to create a tourist and industrial commission to stimulate travel in and development of our state, through a new bill already through the house and now in the senate. I think that by now the great majority of us are convinced that we must do everything we can to stimulate the economic progress of Arizona. It is bound to impress the Legislature that former opponents of this idea have become its ardent supporters, and that it is being given wide press support throughout the state.

The house has also passed the act required to extend the work of the commission now codifying all of our state laws. It's especially worthy of note that now pending before the Legislature are new codes governing health, agriculture and horticulture, banking, underground water and insurance.

The senate has just completed its work on the proposed new insurance code, designed to correct weaknesses now existing in the laws that are supposed to govern the operations of this industry which is so important to almost everyone and every business.

In addition to the bills that have already reached the Governor's desk, quite a number of measures have received the approval of one house and are ready for action by the other. The house has a lead in this respect, both in the importance of the measures passed, and their number.

It isn't a competitive situation at all, but it is worthy of note at this point that the house of representatives has passed 42 bills and the senate has approved 25. Of course, in bills introduced, the house outnumbers the senate by almost 3 to 1.

Of even more importance than what has been done are the bills still pending before both branches of the Legislature, and are now coming out of committees or are receiving final consideration in committees.

High on the list of these vital measures are a number of proposed acts having to do with public health and, in particular, the tuberculosis problem. This legislative session is in a position to do more to correct public health deficiencies than has been accomplished in many years past. Certain legislators have been co-operating very closely with our health authorities in trying to see that effective action is taken on each of the fronts where we have been having trouble -- especially the fronts so unmistakably marked by our appalling records of deaths from diseases.

There's still a possibility of doing something about another form of death -- the sudden death that's stalking our highways. You may have heard or read that the Legislature is reluctant to pass a bill to put a 60-mile-an-hour speed limit on our roads.

Speed alone caused a third of our highway deaths last year, and causes about the same proportion every year. I am reluctant to believe that the Legislature will condemn more than 100 persons to death in the next year alone on the selfish ground that some of the members themselves want to drive faster than 60 miles an hour.

Many of our present laws are on the books solely to protect our citizens from themselves. So, it seems logical beyond argument that a 60-mile per hour speed limit might be added to humanitarian advantage. We've tried quite a few other supposed remedies without much success in reducing the number of our automobile fatalities.

I firmly believe that the challenge of this problem is so great that we cannot give up until or unless we take every possible and every conceivable means to meet it.

There are so many, many worthwhile proposals incorporated in bills now before the 21st Legislature that it would take far more time than we have available just to list them.

The next three weeks or so will tell all of Arizona just how many of these proposals will come to full realization and consequent benefit to all of the people of our state.

One thing that is especially gratifying is that no serious consideration is being given to the imposition of any new or increased taxes. The emphasis rather is on tax relief in one form or another -- such as the determined attack on tax-law weaknesses and the very receptive attitude toward improving school finances and financing.

There is a frightening number of bills requesting big appropriations. The total of these has long since passed 11 million dollars, but believe me, they are receiving the most critical study.

On the whole, at this point, I still feel about the session as I did on the opening day when I said to a joint session of the House and Senate:

"In my judgment no Legislature in the history of the state has applied more solid time and energy to profitable committee study of major problems than has been true of the 21st. If this great and good effort can now be applied to actual working solutions to our problems you will complete a record of accomplishment for the 21st that will be worthy of the highest commendation."

Members of the Legislature are your friends and neighbors. They are your direct voice in the conduct of the state's business and in the protection of your personal welfare. This being true, they certainly should devote the remainder of their time here to doing what is right for Arizona and all its people.

How well they do it, and the final results, will be the subject of our next report following the close of the legislative session.